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A SAMPLE 6 ISSUE ESSAY

The Issue Essay

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## A Sample "6" Issue Essay

We're about to present you with an example of a complete GRE Issue essay. It's based strictly on our template and the outline we built in Step 3. We'll analyze it based on the essay graders' criteria. Below is our sample Issue essay topic, which is designed to be as close as possible to an essay topic that might appear on the GRE.

Our sample topic presents you with a big idea and then asks you to explain your view and back it up with concrete reasons that show why your view is the right one. On the actual exam, you might see a quotation from a famous person, a question, or a statement like ours. No matter what the topic looks like, every Issue essay question will require you to take a position and defend it with examples. And remember, you'll have a choice between two topics, so spend some time determining which one will be easier for

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you to write about.

Here's the sample Issue essay topic again:

**"We can learn more from conflicts than we can from agreements."**

As you read the essay below, note that we've marked certain sentences and paragraphs to illustrate where and how the essay conforms to our template. Use the info in brackets as a reminder of what your own Issue essay needs to include.

Although agreements have value, the juxtaposition of different ideas in a conflict inevitably leads to more significant progress and evolution. [THESIS] What scientific progress would we have, for example, if it weren't for intellectual debate? None—intellectual debate leads to scientific progress. [EXAMPLE 1] The reformation of outdated political ideas and concepts is also marked by struggle. [EXAMPLE 2] Finally, in the words of Friedrich Nietzsche, "What doesn't kill us makes us stronger." This quotation captures the sentiment that personal growth arises from conflict. [EXAMPLE 3]

First, historically, scientific progress has been inspired by conflicts of ideas. [TOPIC SENTENCE FOR EXAMPLE 1] In the sixteenth century, for example, a great debate arose because Copernicus vehemently challenged the notion that the earth is the center of the solar system. Although he paid a price both socially and politically for this remonstrance, Copernicus disabused a long-held belief, much to the chagrin of the Catholic Church and other astronomers of his day. Because of this conflict, humankind eventually gained a new understanding of astronomy. [THREE SENTENCES THAT DEVELOP & SUPPORT EXAMPLE 1]

Second, sociohistorical evolution rarely comes about without turmoil and unrest. [TOPIC SENTENCE FOR EXAMPLE 2] For example, prior to the 1860s in the United States, it was legally acceptable to enslave other human beings and to view them as "property" with few rights. This view led several states to secede from the Union, which, in turn, led to the Civil War, a violent conflict that threatened to destroy the nation. After the war, though, slavery was abolished, and the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution essentially made discrimination on the basis of race illegal. As a result, the United States grew stronger as a nation. To advance takes constant questioning of the status quo. [FIVE SENTENCES THAT DEVELOP & SUPPORT EXAMPLE 2]

Third, conflict can lead to personal growth. [TOPIC SENTENCE FOR EXAMPLE 3] Adversity helps make us stronger. People who have not known some type of conflict or difficulty tend to be immature and spoiled. Americans so believe this sentiment about adversity that they have institutionalized it as an oft-repeated saying: If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. This saying emphasizes the way overcoming difficulty helps us grow as individuals: Each time we fail, we must pick ourselves up and try again. We shouldn't expect life to be easy. Sometimes the value of struggle is in the struggle, meaning that such conflicts, whether internal or external, give us perspective and insight. [SIX SENTENCES THAT DEVELOP & SUPPORT EXAMPLE 3]

Clearly, conflict has been responsible for several upward surges of humankind in diverse respects. In the areas of science, history, and individual character, progress requires struggle. [RECAPS THESIS] Rather than avoiding conflict at all costs, we should accept conflict as a necessary—and beneficial—part of the human condition, whether the conflicts

arise among scholars or states. [EXPANDS THE POSITION] Conflict permits true transformation and growth.

## Why This Essay Deserves a “6”

First, we need to assess whether this essay has the proper three-act structure, as well as the cast of characters that makes for a great Issue essay. Here they are, just to refresh your memory:

- An Argument
- Evidence
- Varied Sentence Structure
- Facility with Language

The organization of the essay follows our template perfectly, both at the paragraph level (topic sentences and development sentences) and at the overall essay level (intro, an action-packed Act II, a strong conclusion). It effectively argues that conflict is necessary to human advancement. It uses three examples from a very diverse array of disciplines—from science to politics to personal growth—to make the argument, and it never veers from using these examples to support the thesis statement’s position. The essay takes a very strong and clear stance on the topic in the first sentence and sticks to it from start to finish.

Sentence structure varies often, making the entire essay more interesting and engaging to the grader. Note, though, how two sentences in paragraph 3 both use colons to link independent clauses. Your sentence structure doesn’t have to be super-fancy each and every time. A little repetition in terms of grammar or sentence patterns won’t hurt your score. The word choice is effective and appropriate. Our writer doesn’t take risks with unfamiliar vocabulary but instead chooses a few out-of-the-ordinary words such as juxtaposition, sentiment, vehemently, and institutionalized. The quotation from Nietzsche adds some spice. No significant grammar errors disrupt the overall excellence of this Issue essay.

## A Note on Length

Our sample essay is twenty-seven sentences long. However, a “6” essay is not based on the particular length of the essay but instead on the quality of the writing and adherence to ETS’s grading criteria. Strong essays will vary in length depending on how the arguments are presented and the language and vocabulary that the writer employs. So don’t worry too much about length. If you follow our step method, you’ll write a strong essay that will satisfy the essay graders.

Here’s a quick-reference chart that takes a closer look at this “6” essay based on the ETS evaluation criteria for graders and on the standards set forth in our Issue essay template.

| ETS CRITERIA | YES<br>OR |
|--------------|-----------|
|--------------|-----------|

|  |                  |
|--|------------------|
|  | NO?              |
| Responds to the issue  | YES              |
| Develops a position on the issue through the use of incisive reasons and persuasive example  | YES              |
| Ideas are conveyed clearly and articulately  | YES              |
| Maintains proper focus on the issue and is well organized  | YES              |
| Demonstrates proficiency, fluency, and maturity in its use of sentence structure, vocabulary, and idioms   | YES              |
| Demonstrates an excellent command of the elements of standard written English, including grammar, word usage, spelling, and punctuation—but may contain minor flaws in these areas | YES              |
| OUR CRITERIA   | YES<br>OR<br>NO? |
| Uses the three-act essay structure   | YES              |
| Thesis statement in first sentence of paragraph 1  | YES              |
| Three examples that support the thesis listed in paragraph 1, in the order in which they're discussed in essay   | YES              |
| Topic sentence for example 1 in paragraph 2  | YES              |
| Development sentences to support example 1   | YES              |
| Topic sentence for example 2 in paragraph 3  | YES              |
| Development sentences to support example 2   | YES              |
| Topic sentence for example 3 in paragraph 4  | YES              |
| Development sentences to support example 3   | YES              |
| Conclusion (paragraph 5) rephrases thesis  | YES              |
| Conclusion (paragraph 5) expands position  | YES              |

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GRE

The Issue Essay

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